

Translating *Beowulf*: An Exploration of Form, Language, and Audience in Translating an Epic
Poem

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1. Introduction

Beowulf, an Old English epic poem, has been published in numerous translations over the last 150 years. Old English poetic convention is significantly different than our own, and in translating this narrative, scholars have to grapple with tricky questions about textual fidelity and sacrifice. What is the most important thing to convey to a reader about this poem: the plot? The Germanic language? The rhythm of the poetry?

It is not an easy problem to solve, and the poem is retranslated so often because translators are always trying to find a better balance between these elements. Seamus Heaney caused quite a stir in 1999 when he published his translation of *Beowulf*: the book was a *New York Times* bestseller, widely lauded by critics for being accessible to a general audience (Schulman and Szarmach 1). However, the reception was less stunning in the academic world: many Anglo-Saxonists expressed disapproval for Heaney's translation, which ignored a great deal of the formal aspects of its source material (Donoghue 15). The recently-published collection of essays *Beowulf at Kalamazoo*, a book which features scholarly writing on performance and translation issues specific to this epic poem, contains 19 different academic reviews of Heaney's publication.

That a translator is expected to convey every aesthetic, stylistic detail of a poem written in a centuries-old format seems impossible, and that a translation that aims for a wide, general audience should be so denounced by the academic community is appalling. Not too long ago, I suffered through high school English, where other students hated reading and fought anything that was not written straightforwardly. I have a hard time imagining that my peers would have been interested in reading a conservative translation of *Beowulf*, especially given that they knew nothing of Old English or its poetic properties.

As presented in modern editions, Old English poetry is composed of lines that are broken into half-lines by a caesura, a scholarly, editorial convention emulated by some recent translators like Howell Chickering. For a reader who knows nothing about this structure, someone who does not understand what a caesura is, the text is, at the very least, visually alienating. The caesuras are marked by larger-than-normal spaces; to a reader with no knowledge, it is easy to suppose that these caesuras are placed at random intervals. The best case scenario is that the reader pauses at them out of confusion, and the worst is that they go ignored as a weird stylistic choice by the translator.

So with the mixed response to Heaney's version in mind, I developed this thesis project. Is it possible to translate *Beowulf* for a general audience and still present the poem faithfully? How much influence should Old English formalism have on the final product? In his book *Translating Beowulf*, Hugh Magennis explores these very questions: he makes observations about a historical shift where earlier translators wrote in an intentionally archaic register, while more recent scholars have aimed for a "natural-sounding modern register" (3), which echoes Talbot in the introduction to his own translation from 1966 (xi). He also notes that verse forms move along this same historical spectrum: "most verse translators...in the past half century or so have based their metre on the (stress-based) metre of Old English...a number of previous translators...preferred syllabic metre (i.e., with a fixed number of syllables to the line)" (4). He indicates that these choices concern themselves with issues of foreignization and domestication (7): should we intentionally make the poem's differences apparent to modern readers, or move it closer to the realm of the familiar?

With all of this conversation buzzing in my brain, I translated three passages—the introductory 25 lines, an elegiac meditation known as the Lay of the Last Survivor, and a battle

scene between Beowulf and Grendel—in a variety of styles, searching for forms that can convey *Beowulf* clearly to a general, non-academic audience. As I worked through these questions in a Modern English context, I began to wonder about Spanish-language translations—as María José Gómez-Calderón notes in her essay “*Beowulf* in Spanish,” “[t]he number of *Beowulf* translations into Spanish is...not a large one” (117), some of which have been marred by the translators’ insistence on contextualizing the poem in Greco-Roman or Norse mythology, neither of which is an apt comparison to make (121). Stylistically, I had several questions about Spanish-language translations, since most existing translations are prose or free verse (129): what sort of formal conventions from the Middle Ages might be useful to utilize? Old Spanish epic poetry has its own set of regulations—would intentionally archaizing my translation using these techniques effectively capture the nature of *Beowulf*? Is it viable or useful to try to fit modern Spanish into the constraints of Old English poetry?

The *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*, edited by Mona Baker, succinctly summarizes some of the ongoing discussions about equivalence (Kenny 77-80): can a translated text ever be a perfect analogue for its original? For the purposes of this project, I operate from the standpoint that it cannot—I have “accepted the untranslatability” of *Beowulf* (Bassnett 22).

2. On Old English Poetic Convention

Old English (hereafter abbreviated as “OE”) poetry has very well-defined rules. Every line consists of two half-lines (separated by a caesura) that each contains two stressed syllables, a total of four stressed syllables per line (Mitchell and Robinson 156). The number of unstressed syllables per half-line varies, as does the pattern in which the stressed and unstressed beats alternate.

Alliteration is very important in OE poetry, too. Half-lines must alliterate with their partners; that is, at least one of the stressed syllables in the first half-line must alliterate with the first stressed syllable of the second line. All consonants alliterate with themselves, just as in Modern English, but vowels work differently: all vowels are considered alliterative with one another, meaning that “all animals are asphyxiated” and “every animal is old” would be considered equally alliterative in OE (Mitchell and Robinson 157). This rule pressed poets to arrange the subjects, objects, and verbs of each clause in varying orders, frequently diffusing them across several lines. This syntactic spreading is possible because OE is a highly inflected language: the grammatical roles (like subject, indirect object, and possessive) are communicated by word endings (desinences) rather than word order. Thus, a subject might be found far from its verb because it might be needed in the previous line to alliterate with something else.

Among the defining stylistic characteristics of OE poetry, three that pose particularly interesting challenges to the translator are apposition, kennings, and compounds. Apposition is the renaming of a noun. For example, “the fighter, the brave warrior, the fierce battler” is an appositive statement which names the person in question three different ways using synonymous words or phrases. This was a very common practice in OE poetry, and might happen two or three times over the course of a few lines. Kennings are “two-fold expressions used in place of

ordinary nouns for the sake of expressive variety” (Fulk, Bjork, and Niles cxv). These are metaphors which express a simple object in a different way—Fulk, Bjork, and Niles give the example of “heofones gim,” which literally translates to “heaven’s gem” (cxv). This is a circumlocutory way of expressing the concept of “the sun,” and expressions like these can prove difficult for a translator because their meanings are not always evident—for example, the kenning “weorðmyndum,” composed of the words meaning “worth” and “memory,” means “honor,” though it is not necessarily evident. My initial suspicion in seeing “weorðmyndum” was perhaps self-esteem: the self-worth one has in one’s own mind. These kennings can prove to be daunting.

Compounds are similar—they are words built with two different words, whose combination creates a different meaning; an example is the compound “feohgift,” which means “dispensing of riches” (Fulk, Bjork, and Niles 374) but is separately composed of “feoh,” meaning “property” and “gift,” which matches its Modern English cognate. Together, “property-gift” means “the giving of riches.” Compounds are more straightforward than kennings, but appear (roughly) once every other line, making *Beowulf* the text with the second-highest number of compounds total among all texts in the OE poetic corpus (Fulk, Bjork, and Niles cxii); their prevalence is equally challenging, if for a different reason.

3. The Introduction (Lines 1-25)

With all of these particular rules and challenges in mind, I began my first set of translations, on the poem's opening 25 lines. The original text follows:

Hwæt, wē Gār-Dena þēodcyninga hū ðā æþelingas	in geārdagum, þrym gefrūnon, ellen fremedon.	
Oft Scyld Scēfing monegum mægþum, egsode eorlas, fēasceaft funden.	sceaþena þrēatum, meodosetla oftēah, syððan ārest wearð Hē þæs frōfre gebād:	5
wēox under wolcnum, oð þæt him āghwylc ofer hronrāde gomban gylðan.	þāra ymbsittendra hýran scolde, þæt wæs gōd cyning.	10
Ðāem eafera wæs geong in gearðum, folce tō frōfre; þæt hīe āer drugon lange hwīle.	æfter cenned, þone God sende fyrenðearfe ongeat aldorlēase	15
wuldres wealdend, Bēow wæs brēme Scyldes eafera Swā sceal geong guma	Him þæs liffrea, woroldāre forgeaf: —blæd wīde sprang— Scedelandum in. gōde gewyrcean,	20
fromum feohgiftum þæt hine on ylde wilgesīþas, lēode gelæsten; in mægþa gehwære	on fæder bearne, eft gewunigen þonne wīg cume, lofdædum sceal man geþeon.	25 [Klaeber 3-4]

3a. Initial Translation+

The first step in translating this passage is a word-for-word, line-by-line method. The results are not dazzling or even logical:

Oh we of the Spear-Danes of the kings of the people how the princes Always Scyld Scefing many tribes terrified earls,	in days gone by, glory found out, courage performed. troops of the enemy of mead-halls seats took away, afterwards first became	5
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that dear companions will support him later,
 in old age, that they may stand by the man when war comes.
 By praiseworthy deeds must a man prosper in any tribe. 25

Trying to parse each word's syntactic role is difficult and occasionally exhausting. The word "geong," for example, appears in the original text in line 13a. The word is the adjective "young," but it is not initially clear what it describes because nothing in 13a can be modified by "geong." For example, this word might describe Scyld Scefing, mentioned earlier in the passage. This is plausible, as it would tell us that Scyld was a young father, but we must look at the declension of "geong" to be sure—it has been declined in the nominative singular form, which matches "eafera" ("offspring") (in line 12a) but not "ðæm," the dative demonstrative pronoun standing in for Scyld. This tells us that "geong" must modify "eafera."

In *Translation Studies*, Bassnett cites Lefevere's seven strategies for poetic translation: phonemic, literal, metrical, prose, blank verse, rhymed, and interpretation (81-2); in this section, I will explore applications of the first five of these approaches, approaches which vary from mimetic—retaining the original form of the poem—to analogical, where culturally-comparable forms are utilized (Connolly 174).

3b. Prose Translations

My next step was to render a prose version of *Beowulf's* opening lines. The original text is an epic poem, which as a narrative style is relatively uncommon in contemporary literature. The conventions of the epic still exist in, for example, *The Lord of the Rings*, but narratives told in verse are rare. One might encounter a novel in verse, like the novels of Ellen Hopkins, but these are far less common than prose narratives. Bassnett notes how challenging it is to translate

“a text from a period remote in time,” saying “the significance of the poem in its context is dead”

(83). Utilizing the prosaic form feels like a very natural, contemporary method to convey a plot.

We heard about the glory of the Spear-Danes' kings, glory
of a bygone era. We heard about how those princes were very brave.
Scyld Scefing always took away the mead-hall seats of many enemy
tribes' troops; he terrified the earls, though he was originally a
nobody. He flourished with honors until other tribes across the
ocean had to obey him and pay him tribute. He was a good king.

He begot young offspring in the palace grounds, offspring
sent by God to console the people; he understood their dire distress,
understood that they had suffered without a leader for a long
time. God gave him secular honor: Beow, Scyld's son, was famous, and
his glory was spoken of among all the Scandinavian peoples. It is a
son's duty to give treasure while still in his father's care so that in old
age he might have dear companions to support him when war comes.

My goal with the above translation was to present the information in the text in the
cleanest, most functional form possible. I actively chose to cut out the apposition in this passage,
like “the Lord of life, the ruler of glory.” In this version, God is named solely as “God.” Though
doing this robs the original of some of its color and poetic voice, the apposition can come off as
tedious and repetitive, which might be off-putting to a broad audience, so I removed these
phrases.

One challenge I faced in presenting this passage in prose was the compounding genitive
phrases. There might be two or three possessives in a row lumping together, like “the glory of
the kings of the Spear-Danes.” Initially, I let it stand, but I was very unsatisfied: “the...of
the...of the...” is dense. It trapped me and lost me, labyrinthine in its construction—I found
myself asking just *whose* glory it was. Because it comes so early in the passage (the first
sentence of the entire poem), I knew that I had to alter it. “The Spear-Danes' kings' glory” was
no better because of the double apostrophe, so I settled on “the glory of the Spear-Danes' kings,”
which mixes the two styles and is a little easier to work through.

I looked at two different prose renditions as I worked—one by E. Talbot Donaldson and the other by Constance B. Hieatt—to see how they handled this problem. Both of them avoided this compounding possessive, but in different ways: Donaldson, for example, repositions one of the genitive nouns: “the glory of the Spear-Danes, kings in the old days” (1), where “kings” is now being modified by “in the old days” so as to avoid the cluster of possessives. Hieatt’s approach collapses this phrase even further. Her opening line: “Indeed, we have heard of the great Danish in days of old” (1). Here, “we have heard of the glory of the kings of the Spear-Danes” is now “we have heard of the great Danish.” There are no possessive nouns, no mention of the “kings” that Talbot repositions, but Hieatt’s translation is just arguably as functional and clear.

Because the passage deals with a lot of background information, it reads rather dully. There is not a lot of room for embellishment, especially if the premise upon which the passage is translated is fidelity to the original. I decided to expand on my original, allowing myself space to experiment with a more decorated prose.

We heard about the glorious Danish kings of yesteryear,
about how valiant and brave their princes were. Scyld Scefing—
a ghastly terror among men—robbed other tribes of their gathering
places, the sticky-floored mead-halls with rows of gleaming wooden
benches. He was a horror for enemy troops.

Before he was a conqueror, Scyld was a waif, found
destitute and alone. His reputation blossomed, bloomed like a
flower with poisonous petals, until all the people across the icy,
foamy sea had to obey him and give him coffers of gold. For the
Spear-Danes, he was a good king.

Scyld had a son, Beow, who was sent by God, the benevolent
Lord, to console Beow’s people; the Ruler of Heaven knew that the
Danes had suffered, starved, barely survived without a leader for
such a long time. So Beow grew and his honor and renown swelled.
It is a son’s duty to hand out treasure, gifts of glowing, glittering gold,
while still under his father’s wing to ensure he has faithful companions
when war breaks out.

Since there is not a lot to describe in the first 25 lines, it was actually a struggle to dress up this passage. My process, then, was to add adjectives whenever I could. I also experimented with putting apposition back into the piece. This more descriptive, flowery version of the prose is about 30 words longer than my first attempt, and—at least for this passage—I do not think that anything can be gained by moving away from functionality. I am curious to see how this experiment plays out with the other two passages, which have more action and description.

That this translation takes so much liberty with the original text, adding description rather freely, it is certain to invoke the same scholarly wrath that Heaney's translation did 15 years ago. In the essay "Languages of *Beowulf* between Klaeber and Heaney," Daniel Donoghue discusses the "Klaeber consensus" (25), the phenomenon by which most Anglo-Saxonists have studied *Beowulf* using one of Friedrich Klaeber's editions of the text (22). This means that for many scholars, "Klaeber's glossary has become a synecdoche, a part of the whole that Anglo-Saxonists call *Beowulf*" (24). Some of the criticism levelled at Heaney is an accusation that he diverged too far from Klaeber. Instead of rigid adherence to a standard glossary, Heaney often chooses synonyms as he converts his literal translation "into lines of poetry" (25).

3c. Blank Verse

But I became concerned with using prose—had I betrayed *Beowulf*'s original form? I pondered contemporary poetic conventions I might use. Blank verse (lines of iambic pentameter with five stressed beats and generally four or five unstressed beats per line) is a fairly common form of poetry still in use today. Like OE poetry, it does not rhyme.

Oh, we heard of the glory of the past,
glory of the brave Spear-Danes' kings.
Scyld Scefing always took away the halls
from many enemies of many tribes.

First a waif, he rose to power and scared
 all the earls—they paid tribute to him.
 God sent to him a son, Beow, to show
 he knew why all the Danes had been distraught:
 for many seasons they'd been leaderless.
 Beow was famous, widely known. Men
 must give their father's treasure so when war
 comes, they might have friends to support them.
 A man prospers with praiseworthy deeds.

The first thing that struck me in translating with blank verse is how much I removed from the passage; the above passage is only 13 lines, compared to the original's 25 lines. I did not worry about preserving every word of the original text and instead focused on crafting rhythmic blank verse. Anything that did not fit easily into the alternations of stressed and unstressed syllables was almost certainly cut. I enjoy the iambic pentameter because its movement feels natural; it mirrors the natural rhythm of Modern English, so there are rarely moments when the meter of the poem is begging for attention by forcing words into strange inflections.

3d. Old English Meter

Several translations adhere to the Old English system of two half-lines with two stressed syllables per line, like Sullivan and Murphy, and I was intrigued by the idea of translating not only the content of *Beowulf* but also its form. Blank verse, while effective, does not capture the movement of the original. Below, I have bolded the alliteration and underlined the stressed syllables.

<u>We</u> discovered	the <u>Spear-Danes'</u> glory
and <u>how</u> the princes	perpetrated <u>bravery</u> .
<u>Scyld</u> Scefing	<u>stole</u> halls <u>away</u> ;
though <u>found</u> <u>destitute</u> ,	he <u>frightened</u> <u>earls</u> .
His power <u>grew</u> —	people paid
him <u>tribute</u> all <u>over</u> .	He was a <u>good</u> <u>king</u> .
He <u>had</u> a <u>son</u> ,	<u>feared</u> by the Swedes ,
<u>given</u> by the Lord	of <u>Life</u> , of <u>Glory</u> .

He, <u>Beow</u> , <u>gave</u>	with <u>great</u> <u>generosity</u>
to <u>secure</u> <u>friends</u>	with his <u>father's</u> <u>gold</u>
so <u>they</u> <u>would</u> <u>help</u>	him <u>when</u> <u>war</u> <u>came</u> .
A <u>man</u> should <u>do</u>	<u>good</u> <u>deeds</u> .

In some of my lines, the alliteration falls on unstressed beats: in line 1 of the translation, for example, “[w]e discovered / the Spear-Danes’ glory”, where the “dis-” in “discovered” and the “Danes” in “Spear-Danes” are unstressed but alliterative. There are some lines for which the alliteration and stress worked out quite nicely (a highlight being line 5, “His power grew— / people paid”), but each time I review this translation, I only notice the moments where the stress doesn’t work.

Modern English and OE feature different stress patterns, which contributes to this translation’s problem. In contemporary English, stress location is variable—there are not strict rules governing which syllable receives a stress. In OE, this is not true: words almost always receive stress on the first beat. The exception is words with unstressed prefixes like “gefrūnon” (line 2): “ge—” does not receive the stress (Mitchell and Robinson 13). This translation does a poor job of replicating the original metrical, stylistic form of the poem but is as readable as my other translations; my concern with this style is again that it is visually alienating with the short word clusters and big spaces to mark caesuras—of course, there are more subtle ways of marking a caesura, as in Chickering, where the half-line breaks are represented by a tiny break.

Sullivan and Murphy’s translation is a little better; they succeed in ensuring each half-line has two stresses. However, the rhythm takes over the poem and gives it a very forceful movement: “Often Scyld Scefing / ambushed enemies, // Took their mead benches, / mastered their troops, // though first he was / forlorn and alone” (1). The heavy focus on the stressed syllables—or perhaps the absence of lots of unstressed syllables to dilute the stressed beats—made me feel like I was riding a fast-galloping horse. Rhythmically, Chickering’s translation

eliminates this bumpy feeling: “Often Scyld Scefing / seized mead-benches // from enemy troops / from many a clan; // he terrified warriors, / even though first he was found // a waif, helpless.”

Unstressed syllables are strewn more loosely in this edition, which aids in a more natural-sounding poetic verse.

3e. Germanic Etymology

Translating a Germanic poem with so many Latinate words is jarring. Rereading my attempt at the half-line style, I see “prince,” “tribute,” “generously,” and “destitute,” among others. I wanted to experiment with a more Germanic etymology to see how the poem reads when adhering to a sound pattern closer to that of the original poem.

We heard of deeds of days gone by
of the Spear-Danes’ crowd-kings,
how their athelings did good.
Scyld Scefing always stole
mead-hall seats and frightened earls,
though he came from nothing.
His honor waxed under the welkin
and the nigh-neighbors over the whale-road
had to heed and give him gold.
He was a good king. Scyld begot a son,
Beow, sent to him by God, a God
who understood their wild woe
of going leaderless so long.
He was well-known among the Swedes.
A young man must give gold-gifts
while still with his father so that
he might have willing thanes at his side when
war comes. A man thrives on thanely deeds.

Using etymology as the most important criterion did not present many issues. There were some words for which it was difficult to find Germanic synonyms, like “distress” and “praiseworthy” (and I am still not too satisfied with the final result, “thanely,” since it’s an invented adjective I used to condense “worthy of a thane”). While I encountered few problems as a translator, it is

apparent that this version will present some difficulty to a general-audience reader. In order to sound Germanic, I used archaic words like “atheling,” “welkin” (I translated this word as “sky” in all my other versions, and “sky” is etymologically Germanic, but the poem’s original “wolcnum” in line 8 is the direct ancestor of archaic modern English “welkin,” which is why I chose to use the word), “thanes,” and “nigh” in the compound “nigh-neighbors.”

Heaney’s translation also preoccupies itself with a less Latinate etymology, but rarely stretches for archaic vocabulary like mine did; in the poem’s opening, for example, the only word that sticks out is “tholed,” which Heaney uses in place of “suffered” (“He knew what [the Danes] had tholed,” line 15) a word that I was unfamiliar with before his translation—etymologically, this has roots in Old English (“þolian”). Words like “princes” and “tribute” are still in his translation, and he uses “companions” in place of “thanes.” Heaney has been criticized for using Irish English dialectal words, which, according to some scholars, “can alienate readers who have no acquaintance with Hiberno-English” (Donoghue 26). Furthermore, “reviewers of every sort have been quick to impute a political motive to his ‘Hibernicisms’ or ‘Ulsterisms,’” notes Donoghue (25): this “motive” is to reclaim English in a region oppressed by the ruling majority by translating one of its oldest pieces of literature with a nonstandard vocabulary. However, “the number of words with an Irish etymology is relatively small...[and] they include ‘bawn,’ ‘bothy,’...[and] ‘kesh,’” (Donoghue 26). I find the anti-Hibernicism criticism irrelevant, because to use only Germanic etymology as I did proves to be just as alienating.

Compounding also presented some difficulty, as it was occasionally very challenging to find two Germanic words that communicated the information of the compound, the aforementioned “nigh-neighbors” being an example. The original word, “ymbstendran” (line 9), is made of “ymb” (“about”) and “stendran” (“to sit”), and like some of the Old English compounds,

the two parts do not necessarily come together to form a clear meaning. This word is most clearly translated as “neighboring people” or “neighboring tribes,” but neither “tribe” nor “people” is Germanic in origin. By using the Germanic “neighbors” and the archaic word “nigh” to communicate these neighbors’ geographical proximity, I approximated the compound’s meaning. “Whale-road” in line 8 is a translation of “hronrāde”, from “hron” (“whale”) and “rād” (“road”); it’s a kenning, metaphorically referring to the ocean as a road on which whales travel. To leave this compound as “whale-road” is a pretty common practice, appearing, for example, in Heaney, Sullivan and Murphy, Chickering, and Donaldson. Because this translation was etymological, I tried to translate compounds literally, by creating a Modern English compound composed of the original’s two parts.

In other cases, the compounds broke down into an adjective and a noun: “wilgesīpas,” from “wil” (“willing”) and “gesīp” (“companion”) is more logically translated as “willing companions” or (as in my translation) “willing thanes” than as a compounded noun—I am not even sure how to attempt it. In other cases, it worked out well; “feohgiftum,” as discussed earlier, can be translated clearly as “gifts of property” or “gifts of treasure” (as I render it in my word-for-word translation), but those options do not retain the compounded nature of the original like “gold-gifts,” which communicates the same information.

3f. Old English Imitative

A surprising result of my phonological translation was some alliteration—in particular, the compounds “nigh-neighbors,” “crowd-kings” (from “pēodecyninga,” composed of “pēod” and “cyning,” meaning “people” and “king,” respectively), and “gold-gifts” alliterate. The rhythm felt more parallel to *Beowulf*. I was encouraged by all of these happy accidents so I tried to

render the poem in half-line style again while working with my more Germanic vocabulary.

Once again, I have bolded the alliterative sounds in each line and underlined the stressed syllables.

We heard of **days**-gone-by
and how their **crowd**-**kings**,
Scyld **Scefing** always stole
and **frightened** earls,
His mind-**worth** waxed
and the **nigh**-**neighbors**
to heed and give
a **son**, Beow,
who fathomed **wild**
leaderless
well-known inside
A man must give
so **when** **war** comes
thanes with him.

deeds of the **Spear**-**Danes**
their athelings, were **keen**.
mead-hall seats
though **first** from nothing.
under the welkin
never forgot
him **gold**. He begot
sent from God,
woe from being
so long. Beow was
all Scandinavia.
gold-gifts in heaps
he might have willing
Men thrive on good deeds.

Once again, I have bolded the alliterative sounds in each line and underlined the stressed syllables. This was much more successful than my previous attempt at the half-line style. Each half-line has exactly two stressed syllables, and at least one of these stressed syllables alliterates with a stressed syllable in its partner half-line. However, this isn't *exactly* the same as Old English convention: as Bradley notes "the first stressed syllable of the second half-line...must always participate in the line's alliterative scheme (and must be the *only* alliterating syllable in the second half-line)" (288), and one more than one occasion, I violate this rule. In line 7, for example, "to heed and give / him gold. He begot" features alliteration on both of the stressed syllables in the second half-line, while in line 13, "so when war comes / he might have willing" only alliterates on the second syllable of the second half-line.

Sullivan and Murphy's translation does a lot of the same work, though I question their lexical choices, which feel strange and forced: "So! The Spear-Danes / in days of old // were led by lords / famed for their forays" (1). Their alliteration is not always successful—there is no

alliteration that carries through an entire line, though half-lines one, three, and four all feature alliteration within themselves. The fourth half-line is a particularly prominent example of forced alliteration: “famed for their forays” is a construction that caught my attention, and not in a good way; it is awkward and arresting.

The glee of my success clouded my mind, and I lost track of the original intention in undertaking this project—a general, non-academic readership. Yes, all of my syllables fell in the right places, and all my consonants lined up so nicely, but how useful is this translation to a classroom full of high school freshmen who come to *Beowulf* with no knowledge of OE or its poetic conventions? The vocabulary is incredibly difficult, and my focus on breaking up the poem into half-lines at times obscures the meaning of the narrative. I have a hard time tracking, for example, the sentence “...He begot // a son, Beow, / sent from God, // who fathomed wild / woe from being // leaderless / so long.” Who fathomed the “wild woe,” and whose woe is it? Line 4b, “though first from nothing,” has compressed the idea that Scyld was without a family or riches so far that its meaning is not at all clear. My other translations are much better at making these distinctions clear, but this one as it stands has excised a lot of information from the original in the interest of stressed syllables, alliteration, and etymology. I do not feel comfortable sacrificing so much for the reader in favor of obeying the poem’s style.

4. The Lay of the Last Survivor (Lines 2231-2270)

Having focused on Old English form as I translated the opening passage, most of which I judged unsuccessful for general readers, I decided to try my hand at several contemporary poetic forms. The second passage I will translate is known as The Lay of the Last Survivor, the account of a lone warrior who buries his kinsmen's treasures and mourns their passing (Kennedy 39).

Below is the original OE text:

-----	þær wæs swylcra fela	
in ðām eorðse(le)	ǣrgestrēona,	
swā hȳ on gēardagum	gumena nāthwylc,	
eormenlāfe	ǣbelan cynnes,	
þanchycgende	þær gehȳdde,	2235
dēore mǣðmas.	Ealle hīe dēað fornam	
ǣrran mǣlum,	ond sē ān ðā gēn	
lēoda duguðe,	sē ðær lengest hwearf,	
weard winegeōmor,	(wēn)de þæs yl(c)an,	
þæt hē lȳtel fæc	longgestrēona	2240
brūcan mōste.	Beorh eall gearo	
wunode on wonge	wæterȳðum nēah	
nīwe be nāsse	nearocræftum fæst;	
þær on inn(a)n bær	eorlgestrēona	
hringa hyrde	h(o)rdwyrðne dæl	2245
fættan goldes,	fē(a) worda cwæð:	
‘Heald þū nū, hrūse,	nū hæleð ne m(ō)stan	
eorla æhte.	Hwæt, hyt ær on ðē	
gōde begēaton;	gūðdēað fornam	
(f)eorhbeal(o) frēcne	fyrena ge(h)wylcne	2250
lēoda mīnra	þ(o)n(e) ðe þis [līf] ofgeaf;	
gesāwon seledrēam(as).	Nāh hwā sweord wege	
oððe f(orð bere)	fæted wæge	
dryncfæt dēore;	dug(uð) ellor s[c]ēoc.	
Sceal se hearda helm	(hyr)stedgolde,	2255
fætum befeallen;	feormynd swefað	
þā ðe beadogrīman	bȳwan sceoldon;	
gē swylce sēo herepād,	sīo æt hilde gebād	
ofer borda gebræc	bite īrena	
brosnað æfter beorne.	Ne mæg byrnan hring	2260
æfter wīgfruman	wīde fēran	
hæleðum be healfe.	Næs hearpan wyn,	
gomen glēobēames,	nē gōd hafoc	
geond sæl swingeð,	nē se swifta mearh	

Along with war-leader	widely go,	
With warriors by side.	By no means is the joy of the harp,	
Sport of the harp,	nor good hawk	
Throughout hall he swings,	nor the swift horse	
Fortified place strikes.	Baleful death has	2265
Many of the human race	henceforth destroyed.”	
So sad of mind	sorrow he complained of	
Alone after all of them,	joyless he went	
Days and nights,	until death’s flood	
Reached at his heart.		2270

After finding the meaning for each word, I went about rearranging the jumbled sentences into the following, which makes sense to a Modern English reader:

There were many such ancient treasures
 In the earth-hall, just as in days of yore,
 Belonging to I don’t know whom,
 An immense legacy of noble people;
 Contemplative, here he hid dear treasures. 2235
 Death destroyed all of them in earlier times,
 And still one of the men of that body of retainers,
 He remained there the longest, a guardian mourning his friends.
 He expected the same: that he might have been
 Allowed to enjoy the old treasures for only a little while. 2240
 The barrow stood on the plain near the water-waves,
 Near the bluff, new, ready, and constrictedly-crafted;
 Into there, he carried a share of nobles’ treasures,
 Treasures of decorated gold, hoard-worthy treasures.
 The guardian of rings spoke a few words: 2245
 “Now hold you, earth, because heroes cannot,
 Properties of the earls. Lo, good people acquired it
 From you before; death, deadly attack,
 The daring one, took away every one of the men
 Of my people in battle, they who gave up this life. 2250
 They had seen joys of the hall. I don’t have anyone
 Who might carry a sword or bear forth a gold-plated cup,
 Dear drinking vessel; the troop of experienced retainers
 Departed elsewhere. The hard helmet, decoratively-wrought
 With gold, must be deprived of decoration; polishers sleep, 2255
 Those who must prepare the helmet;
 And likewise the war-cloak, which endured the cut of irons
 Over the crashing of shields while at war,
 It falls to pieces just like man. The corselet and byrnie cannot
 Widely go along with the war-leader 2260
 On the backs of warriors. By no means does the joy of the harp,

—The sport of the glee-beam—nor the good hawk
 Swing throughout the hall, nor does the swift horse
 Strike the courtyard.
 Baleful death has destroyed 2265
 Many of the human race.
 So sad of mind, he complained of sorrow,
 Alone without all of them; he went without joy
 For days and nights, until death's flood
 Reached at his heart. 2270

One tricky aspect of this section was apposition: in several instances, death is named and renamed (“guðdeað fornam // feorhbealo frecne,” in lines 2249 and 2250, feature three different appositives: “death,” “deadly attack,” and “the daring one.” As a translator, this surprised and confounded my expectations, especially because in some instances death is named only with an adjective (“frecne”). Naming a person, place, or thing with solely an adjective is not typically a viable construction in Modern English (there are exceptions: “youth is wasted on the young,” for example, features an adjective without an accompanying noun), so each time I encountered such a usage, I struggled to interpret to whom or what the adjective was connected.

4b. Sestina

Having determined that adhering to specific etymologies or syllabification patterns might prove too opaque for a general audience; I searched for other forms of poetry, wishing to convey at the very least that *Beowulf* is an epic poem rather than a prose narrative. The first form I attempted was sestina, a poetic form composed of six sextets and an *envoi*. The words that end the six lines of the first sextet must remain the end-words of each sextet, changing places according to a set pattern; the three-line *envoi* must feature two of the six end-words in each line (Strand & Boland 21).

There were dozens of treasures
 In the old barrow, just like before,

A hoard of a noble tribe of men.
 They were hidden here by the last survivor,
 The only one left behind by cruel death,
 The man not lost in bloody battle.

He began to speak, trying to battle
 His despair: "Hide these glorious treasures,
 Earth, since my warriors cannot; death
 Took them all away, before
 They could enjoy their riches." The survivor
 Choked back tears. "My men

Have left me now, the men
 Who might wield a weapon in battle
 Or act as cup-bearer; the rare survivor,
 Like the gold-wrought helmet, treasures
 We held dear, which were decorated before,
 Go without their shining ornament in death.

The ferocious monster—death—
 Has claimed the polishers, the men
 Who prepared the helmets; before,
 They took care of the battle-
 Armor and the swords, iron treasures
 That, merciless, left behind not one survivor.

The war-cloak, a straggling survivor
 Of battle-times, rusts to death
 Like its owner and his treasures.
 The hall, once full of men,
 Is silent, quieted by battle.
 No harps sing like before,

No horse stamps its hooves like before,
 No hawk flies through the hall. The only survivor
 Of the vicious, bloody battle
 Of life is baleful death,
 Who steals so many valiant men
 And leaves me to mourn with their treasures."

It was thus that he complained before ruthless death
 claimed him, the last survivor now reunited with his men,
 the battle finally over. In the open lay their treasures.

The attraction of a sestina was the repeating endings; as I translated the Lay passage, I noticed how frequently repetition occurs—the subject of this section of *Beowulf* is very concerned with death, treasure, and battle, so it didn't seem implausible to set up a repeating cycle of endings concerning these matters. Because the form has a strict formal convention, it seemed like a good middle ground between free verse and OE's complex rules.

What I found most challenging about using the sestina form was the commitment to my choices for end-words. I struggled in particular with “survivor,” a word which I first used to refer to the man who speaks in the passage. Each time the word appeared, I was tempted to use “survivor” to refer back to him; the first draft of this version, in fact, featured that exact usage each time. That repetition was not engaging, but boring; one of the rewarding features of a sestina is being able to use the six end-words in subtly changing ways, which I feel I have achieved better in the version presented above.

The second word that gave me the most trouble was “before.” I chose it because I wanted to emphasize the reminiscent quality of the passage, to capitalize on the painful nostalgia that the last survivor is experiencing, but I had trouble integrating it into the third stanza. “Treasures / we held dear, which were decorated before, / go without their shining ornaments in death” is a painfully awkward series of clauses, but I'm stymied as to how I ought to better rework the original material into these constraints. On the other hand, “before” gave me a result that I really enjoyed at the end of stanza five and the beginning of stanza six: “no harps sing like before / no horse stamps its hooves like before” has a repetition and parallel structure that really pleased me.

Overall, the sestina proved a satisfactory form in allowing me to focus on a particular aspect of this section, namely the repetition. However, it's clear that this would not be viable to carry out across the 3,182 lines of the original epic, which would be much more challenging.

How would one consistently divide the poem into chunks with enough similarity and repetition to fuel a new sestina each time? If I were to execute this style for the duration of *Beowulf*, my initial impulses would be to condense and compress sections in order to find overarching themes or, failing that, add in my own material in order to fill up the seven stanzas of each sestina. If it comes to the point of inventing new text to supplement a translation style, it hardly seems to be a worthwhile endeavor. While a sestina is readable, and is formally intriguing and challenging enough to *evoke* the complexity of the original's metrical system, it isn't a promising method for the entire work.

One reason why this section is so easy to render in sestina is the episodic, digressive nature of *Beowulf*. Adrien Bonjour notes that “the use of numerous digressions and episodes” is “characteristic” of the poem (Bjork 199); much of the poem consists of these small scenes that aren't necessarily directly connected to the story of Beowulf and his rise to the throne. This means that it's easy to cut one of these episodes out and evaluate it separately, which can't be said for the entire text—excerpting just the fight between Beowulf and Grendel's mother, for example, leaves out all of the necessary pre-knowledge that Beowulf has come from far away to defeat Grendel, has fought and killed him, and now has to face his scary mother who wants revenge.

4c. Haiku

My next method is a common poetic form, the haiku. On more than one occasion in my primary school education, my language arts class would discuss and write haikus—based on my own education, the form is accessible and familiar. Their rules are simple—a line of five syllables, a line of seven syllables, and another of five (Kovacs 65).

In the loamy earth
Were many golden treasures,
Metallic keepsakes.

The last survivor
Hid these treasures in the earth,
Dark, musty barrow.

Death destroyed all his
Closest companions and left
Him alone to mourn.

The barrow stood on
The flat, empty plain, near the
Churning water-waves.

The guardian spoke:
“Now you must hold these gifts, Earth,
Within your wide womb,

Since all my friends, the
Men who earned these treasures in
Battle, can’t guard them.

Most fearless death cut
Open my troop and let their
Red, pulsing blood free;

I have no one to
Carry a sword or bring me
Darkest night-sky wine.

The war-cloak, with its
Many iron rings, rusts to
Pieces like its man.

Our hall is empty—
No sweet music of the harp,
No keen-eyed, crafty hawks,

No tawny stallions
To stamp their strong, hardened hooves—
Devoid of all joy.

Vile death has sucked
The marrow from the bones of

Bravest warriors.”

His body full to bursting
With gloomy, endless woe, the
Last survivor wept

Through fiery skies—
Through sunrises and sunsets—
Until his heart stopped.

One of my primary challenges with the form was the temptation to make each stanza one sentence: stretching a thought across two or three haikus proved problematic to me. The original form of a haiku is one that stands alone as a complete thought; the 17 syllables should act as a complete movement. To translate a sentence from *Beowulf* as several haikus was, to me, a violation of the form. Therefore, to avoid it wherever possible, I excised material, compressing to fit the syllable count.

Violating the tradition of the haiku presented another challenge, too. The poems are typically composed as reflections on nature (Higginson & Harter 87), and the Lay of the Last Survivor has little to do with the natural world and very much to do with mourning, companionship, and loneliness. I chose to let this historical precedent alter my focus in this version of the passage: an earlier draft of the haiku form featured few descriptions of the natural world, which bothered me, so I rewrote it to include more descriptions, often freestyling to add in descriptions of nature (even if small: “churning water-waves” is more descriptive of the nearby ocean than the original, though barely). Certainly a haiku is a viable form for translation—that is, a translator could write the entire poem in haiku without much difficulty—but there is a disparity between the purpose of the form and the purpose of the original; I didn’t take issue with adding more about nature into this excerpt, but I might fight that urge if I were to apply this aesthetic to the entire text.

Within the haiku world, there is some contention about the 5-7-5 pattern I chose to follow in this translation: according to the article “Why No ‘5-7-5?’” on the National Haiku Writing Month website, the commonly-held conception about this syllabification rule is an oversimplification of a centuries-long Japanese literary tradition, and furthermore an erroneous one. In the Japanese haiku, what is counted is not syllables but the number of sounds per line, a system not necessarily transparent to people outside the system (“So how many sounds are counted in the word ‘Nippon,’ Japan’s name for itself? It actually counts as four sounds [nip-p-on-n]”). I took this into consideration, but that the article exists means that its purpose is to fight against a popular misconception; in the interest of aligning myself with that popular idea of what a haiku *is*, I have chosen intentionally to practice the 5-7-5 method. To that end, perhaps a distinction can be made between a haiku and a “haiku,” my translation here falling into the latter category.

4d. Ghazal

Keeping in mind the concern about the typical subject of a haiku, I looked for poetic forms more in line with these ideas of mourning and loss. Charles W. Kennedy, in an introduction to his translation included in a collection called *Old English Elegies*, says the passage “vividly illustrat[es] the substance and spirit of Old English elegy...and brings immediately to mind [other similar poems] like the *Wanderer*” (38) because of its use “elegiac elements” like “formal speech” (here he refers to the “address to earth itself”) and “its lament for the vanished glory of the past” (40).

I searched for a more elegiac form, which is how I discovered the ghazal. This form of poetry “[t]raditionally invok[es] melancholy, love, longing, and metaphysical questions”; they

belong to a Middle Eastern tradition and “are often sung by Iranian, Indian, and Pakistani musicians.” Their form consists of “a minimum of five couplets—and typically no more than fifteen...[t]he first couplet introduces a scheme, made up of a rhyme followed by a refrain. Subsequent couplets pick up the same scheme in the second line only, repeating the refrain and rhyming the second line with both lines of the first stanza” (Kovacs 62). My ghazal translation:

I am all alone, a lonely man, because of death’s cold hand.
My battle-brothers have been grabbed by death’s cold hand.

Here I stand among the heaps of my people’s war-treasures
And soon the only hand to enjoy this gold will be death’s cold hand.

The dutiful cup-bearers with their rich wines and the attentive
Helmet-polishers have had their eyelids closed by death’s cold hand.

The many-ringed byrnie, the metal war-cloak will,
Like its steadfast warrior, rust under death’s cold hand.

Our hall stands empty, silent of harp song and friendly quarrel;
Our joy has been quieted—our mouths covered—by death’s cold hand.

And so I remain, the last survivor of a noble people, my heart
Empty and old, aching for the frigid grip of death’s cold hand.

What renders this form so effective is the repetition at the end of each couplet, and choosing “death’s cold hand” as the ending provided a lot of opportunities to reinforce the somber sorrow that the last survivor complains of toward the end of the original passage. One conscious choice I made in this version that I did not elsewhere is to eliminate the frame narrative surrounding the last survivor: instead of a narrator introducing the scene (that is, describing first the barrow of treasures and then the man regarding it) and reporting the last survivor’s dialogue, this version comes solely from his perspective.

This is by far my most compressed translation: 12 lines from 39. An immense amount of detail—the hawk and the horse and the existence and nature of the barrow, for example—has

been excised, but I feel that this version most effectively captures the mood of the piece, both in adhering to the poetic progeny of the form and in tonally submersing the reader into the last survivor's despair. My other forms have not, I think, accurately captured the tone of this passage. To apply a ghazal aesthetic to the entire poem, however, might be erroneous, as there are plenty of scenes that don't meditate on loss. The ghazal is a great fit here, but not for the text as a whole.

4e. Cinquain

The last form I wanted to explore in translating the Lay of the Last Survivor passage is the cinquain, which I chose because of its stress-focused stylistics: each stanza is composed of five lines; the first line features one stressed syllable, then two, then three, then four, then one again (Kovacs 43). That the primary constraint of this form is stress-based made it appear a good fit for translating OE stress-based poetry. Cinquains may or may not rhyme; I chose *not* to employ a rhyme scheme for the same reason that I chose a stress-counting poetic form, to approach the aesthetic of the original (but not imitate it, as in my previous section).

There were many
Ancient treasures
In the earth-hall then,
Buried by a last survivor
Belonging to

A tribe
Of fierce warriors.
Death had claimed his men,
Robbed him of father-land friends.
He knew

He wouldn't
Enjoy the treasures
For very long. The barrow,
Near the cold, wavering waters,

Was dark

And narrow.
In there, he hid
The treasures, tainted with heartbreak
Gold gone dull with grief.
He said,

“Death
Has dug its claws
Into the souls of my brother-warriors;
There’s no one left to polish the cup
Or carry

The sword.
The ringmail cannot
Coat the warrior’s back;
It rusts apart like its man.
Our hall,

Once lively,
Is quiet, empty
Of joyful, melodious harpsong;
No jovial laughter reaches the rafters.”
The man,

Alone,
He thus complained
Until death’s tides
Rose up, submerged, and drowned his heart.
He died.

I accidentally skewed sentences across the stanzas—rather than trying to neatly contain sentences to stanzas, a concern I had with the haiku, I let ideas roam across stanza breaks. Visually, this mirrors the complex syntactic constructions of the original poem; this section, which as I have mentioned feels at odds with the poem as a whole, features hyperbaton to intentionally slow down the reading (or recitation) experience. The technique of stretching sentences is at least somewhat arresting, approximating to some degree the labyrinthine syntax of the original.

He remembered then the good, / kinsman Hygelac's
 Evening-speech, / upright stood up
 And laid hold of him firmly; / fingers burst; 760
 Giant was turning outward, hero furthermore marched.
 He intended the notorious (one) / where he could thus
 Reach by flight / and on (the) way from where
 To flee (to) fen-retreats; / he knew power of his fingers
 in the claws of the angry one. / That was grief-filled journey 765
 That the harm-doer / to Heorot (he) walked toward (took a journey).
 Splendid hall resounded; / for all the Danes it came to pass,
 For the fortress-dwellers, / for each of the brave ones,
 To men terror. / Angry were both,
 Furious guardians of the house. / (The) hall resounded. 770
 That was great wonder / that the wine-hall
 Withstood the battle-beasts / that it in earth not fall,
 Fair building; / but he of the fast was
 In and out / of the iron bands
 Forged with cunning thought fastened. / There from floor wrenched 775
 Mead-bench many, / as I have heard say
 With gold prepared, / there the hostile (ones) struggled.
 They didn't expect before / wise men of the Scyldings
 That it always by ordinary means / any men
 Excellent and decorated with bone / to shatter might could, 780
 With skills to pull apart / unless embrace of fire
 might have swallowed in the flame. / Noise upward arose
 new sufficiently; / to North-Danes emanated
 dreaded horror; / of each one
 of those that from wall / weeping they heard, 785
 terrible song to sing, / God's enemy
 without victory / wounds to bewail
 captive of hell. / Held him fast
 he who was the strongest of men / by means of his strength
 in that day / of this life. 790

Below, I rearrange my words into Modern English syntactic constructions to provide clear meaning:

Then the good (one), Hygelac's kinsman, he remembered
 The evening-speech, he stood upright
 And laid hold of [Grendel] firmly; fingers broke; 760
 The giant [Grendel] was turning outward, the hero marched farther.
 The notorious one [Grendel] intended to flee
 To fen-retreats, which he could reach by flight;
 He knew the power of his fingers
 In the claws of the angry [Beowulf]. That was [a] grief-filled journey 765

That the harm-wrecker took to Heorot.
 (The) splendid hall resounded; terror came to pass for all the Danes,
 For the fortress-dwellers, for each of the brave ones,
 For the warriors. Both guardians of the house
 Were angry, furious. The hall resounded. 770
 Then there was great wonder that the wine-hall
 Withstood the battle-beasts, that the fair building
 Did not fall to the earth; but it was fastened
 Inside and out with iron bands forged with cunning thought.
 There many a mead-bench, prepared with gold, was wrenched 775
 From the floor, as I have heard tell, where the hostile ones struggled.
 The wise men of the Scyldings, didn't previously expect
 That ever any man by ordinary means
 Might shatter it, excellent and decorated with bone,
 Might skillfully pull it apart, 780
 Unless the embrace of fire should swallow it in flame.
 Noise arose upward, sufficiently surprising;
 Dreaded horror emanated to the North-Danes,
 To each one of those that from the wall
 Heard God's enemy, captive of hell, 785
 Heard his terrible weeping,
 Heard him sing a terrible song and bewail his wounds,
 A song without victory. (He) held (Grendel) fast,
 He who was the strongest of men by virtue of his strength
 On that day of this life. 790

This passage challenged me because of subject and object ambiguity; as Grendel and Beowulf fight, it is not always clear who is doing what to whom, an effect that is probably intentional. For example, in describing Grendel as "the notorious one," it wasn't immediately clear to me to whom that description applied. Perhaps it is Grendel, because he is a notorious monster, but it could have been Beowulf, renowned for his strength and prowess.

In line 764 "wiste his fingra geweald," it was not clear to me who knew whose fingers were powerful. I initially suspected that it was Beowulf—I read this passage as a moment of self-discovery, that Beowulf was surprised to find out how strong his own fingers were as he held onto Grendel. However, after I consulted existing translations, I saw that this is not the consensus—Donaldson in his prose translation says "he knew his fingers' power to be in a

hateful grip” (15), a clause in a sentence entirely about Grendel, and Chickering’s poetic verse renders it “felt his fingers / In a terrible grip,” also a clause in a group of clauses about Grendel (93).

One moment of confusion in translation was the compound “ealuscerwen” (l. 769): Klaeber’s glossary provides “distress, terror” (362); Clark-Hall’s dictionary offers “mortal panic” (76); Jack’s in-page gloss suggests “terror” (72). After using these translations, I chose “terror,” but when comparing mine to other editions, I noticed that Chickering translates as “mead-sharing” (93). I consulted another glossary, Mitchell and Robinson, where their initial translation is “ale-shower” (254); indeed, the word is composed of these two parts, but the connection between a shower of ale and terror is, to me, a very opaque one. I relied merely on glossary and translation consensus in rendering the word “terror,” because a choice like Chickering’s, to preserve the original compound, is puzzling and difficult to follow.

5b. Cento

A concern that occurred to me as I worked through the poetic forms in the Lay section (as well as the cento above) was the nature of each form: these forms are lyric, while *Beowulf* is a narrative. Could I ever truly be satisfied by forcing a lyric style to tell a narrative? I turned first to the cento, something more experimental than I had tried previously.

The cento form makes poetry out of other poems—it’s not quite the same as a found poem, where certain words are crossed out and what remains reads as a poem, but the idea of incorporating other material is central to this form (Chambers 180). Historically, this has been used for narratives, including a work by Proba Falconia that presents a history of the life of Jesus using poetry from Virgil (Chambers 180). For my cento, I chose to use another epic poem: *The*

Odyssey, which was my first experience with epic poetry, and is, like *Beowulf*, widely taught in secondary school education. Relying on this familiarity in the same way that I did when I used the haiku form, I cobbled together a “translation” of the fight scene using Fagles’ translation. All of the text comes from Book 9 of *The Odyssey*, where Odysseus and his crew encounter the cyclops Polyphemus:

Lurching up, [Beowulf] lunged out with his hands toward [Grendel],
 Clutching him by his back, fighting spirit.
 [Beowulf] escaped a sudden death,
 Thrusting his arms round the grim loner.
 [Grendel] was dead set in his own lawless ways—
 Here was a piece of work, a monster built
 Like no mortal: violent, savage, looming darkly.
 In the high-walled yard, the hearts inside [the Spear-Danes] shook,
 Terrified by [Grendel’s] rumbling voice and monstrous hulk.
 [Beowulf], fighter clad in power, massive strength,
 Ripping [Grendel] limb from limb.
 Avoid [his] wrath! [His] fame has reached the skies.

The first challenge presented by the cento was in deciding how to handle the specific character names—there is no one called “Beowulf” in the Greek epic, so how would I write his name? I could have used only appositives, referring to Beowulf as “the warrior” or “the man,” and indeed there is one such instance where I use “the grim loner” to refer to Grendel, but this seemed unnecessarily cumbersome and harkened back to the problems I faced translating the original passage. I opted, then, to put names and pronouns in brackets where they were added or changed from the original material.

The second challenge I faced was dealing with the description of Heorot; in the original passage, there is as much dedicated to describing how sturdily constructed the hall is as there is details of Grendel and Beowulf locked in combat. The passage from *The Odyssey* does contain descriptions of buildings: book 9 begins with Odysseus in Alcinous’ palace before flashing back to the scene with Polyphemus, and there are descriptions of the furniture in Polyphemus’ cave.

I thought about repurposing these passages—Heorot would no longer be made with cunningly-crafted bands of iron, true, but at least there would be a building described. I decided against it, however, choosing instead to omit the description of the hall.

At first read-through, I thought that talking about the furniture distracted from the battle scene, but in reality it serves to heighten how violent the tussle is: the Danes cannot believe that benches are being ripped from the ground, because they thought the hall was indestructible. If I couldn't find Homeric text that conveyed this idea, then there seemed no reason to include descriptions of Alcinous' tables and wine-bearers or Polyphemus' racks of cheese. Perhaps if I scoured the entire text, I might have been able to find enough to cobble together a description, but I wanted to limit my range to one part of *The Odyssey* in the hopes that there would be some thematic, textual unity in translating one part of *Beowulf* using one part of *The Odyssey*.

As a text, the cento feels very fragmentary, which in the context of a battle scene is an effective aesthetic. I intentionally chose to leave out conjunctions or articles that didn't appear alongside the parts of the text I excerpted to heighten this effect: “[Beowulf], fighter clad in power, massive strength, / ripping [Grendel] limb from limb,” a jumble of clauses ripped from the original text, feels jerky and fast-paced, much like watching or participating in an actual fight might feel.

Perhaps it might be possible to translate the entirety of *Beowulf* in this style: the translator might have to rely on more texts than *The Odyssey* to accomplish this feat (perhaps using *The Iliad*, too, might suffice, or Milton's *Paradise Lost*). A lot of decisions would have to be made in the same vein as my decision regarding the descriptions of Heorot, regarding incompatibility of certain ideas from one text to another. If I were to undertake this as a longer project, I suspect

this would lead to a lot of condensing and omission, because I would feel more comfortable with a shorter text than a half- or mistranslated idea.

5c. Ballad

Thus, I turned to the ballad form, used to tell a variety of stories, including “stories of lost love, supernatural happenings, or recent events” or, more generally, attention-grabbing, tabloid-like events (Strand & Boland 73-4). Stanzas are composed of four lines, organized with a rhyme scheme, usually ABAB or ABCB; there is not a solid consensus about line length (75).

Mighty Beowulf rose up to fight the beast;
The words of Hrothgar rang in his head.
He laid hold of Grendel, felt his fingers snap.
Brave Beowulf fought Grendel, who ended up dead.

The devil-spawn had come to the hall for a feast.
Beowulf’s grip was strong; Grendel wished he had fled
Back to his monstrous mother—this felt like a trap.
Brave Beowulf fought Grendel, who ended up dead.

Heorot echoed with the ruckus of battle; at least
The hall, made of iron and bone, withstood the tread
Of their stomping feet and their violent scrap.
Brave Beowulf fought Grendel, who ended up dead.

They ripped up the benches, forged with gold, pieced
Together by careful craftsman, so I have heard said.
The warrior was winning: the demon let out a yap.
Brave Beowulf fought Grendel, who ended up dead.

His wail was piercing—the Danes thought him deceased.
Beowulf held him fast, his hunger for victory fed,
While the hell-creature shrieked, felt his sinews unwrap.
Brave Beowulf fought Grendel, who ended up dead.

Like the cento, the first thing that came to my attention upon considering the finished product is the aesthetic of the piece: the word I’d use to describe it is “folksy,” an aesthetic I ascribe to the ballad generally; words like “scrap” for “fight” and “yap” for “wail,” words I

chose out of necessity to adhere to the rhyme scheme of the piece, definitely have a less sophisticated connotation to them, as does the refrain that I wrote for the fourth line of every stanza: “ended up dead” feels like a very circumlocutory way of saying “died,” but it contributes to the grassroots feeling of the piece. This was purely accidental, but Strand and Boland say “the ballad insists on ordinary, day-to-day speech and vernacular” (76); without trying, I correctly recreated the aesthetic.

Having assuaged my concerns about narrative versus lyric poetry, I must admit it’s not a perfect fit for a text as long as *Beowulf*. Definitely it’s viable as a method of translating in particular the three battle sequences between Beowulf and Grendel, Grendel’s mother, and the dragon, but it would be impossible to sustain this ABCB pattern across the entire poem, at least with the rhymes I chose (I had to consult a rhyming dictionary several times for words that rhyme with “snap,” then figure out ways to incorporate those words, which were very few). This form also raises the same concern that the sestina did when I translated the Lay of the Last Survivor: it would require the text to be arbitrarily sliced into smaller chunks of narrative in order to reuse the ballad system, with the possible risk of relying too heavily on omission. Unlike the cento, I was able to work in the information about Heorot into this version, so this specific passage is not a great example of erasure for the sake of the formal constraints, but it’s easy to imagine eschewing apposition or anecdotal information that gets in the way of the rhyme scheme.

5d. Visual Adaptations

Because the last passage of my translation is a battle scene, I also thought about visual translations—there is a lot of action and movement implied by the description in the original

text, but what would that look like in a different medium, and how might it heighten the tension and excitement of the scene?

The first visual adaptation I sought out was a graphic novel by Gareth Hinds. Until the scene of the fight with Grendel, the artwork consists of a lot of big, full-page or even two-page spreads with huge blocks of text that explain background information or are characters' monologues. However, the battle between Grendel and Beowulf is noticeably different: the text blocks disappear, leaving us only with illustrations. The page is divided into many smaller panels, which do not necessarily fit together in perfect squares and rectangles—many of the blocks are trapezoids. The slanting lines are arresting and disorienting, which augments the secondhand adrenaline feeling of witnessing a fight (see fig. 1).

Baetans and Frey note that Alison Bechdel, in her graphic novel memoir *Fun Home*, “always displays a radical shift from regular to less-regular page layout each time she wants to stress a plot turn,” remarking that the “relative discreteness of the layout is dramatically disrupted each time something crucial takes place in the story” (126). The idea in Hinds' adaptation is the same: all regularity and orderliness in the panels and page layout disappears in the moment of the fight, a rhetorical shift in the development of the narrative to indicate that something “crucial” is happening.

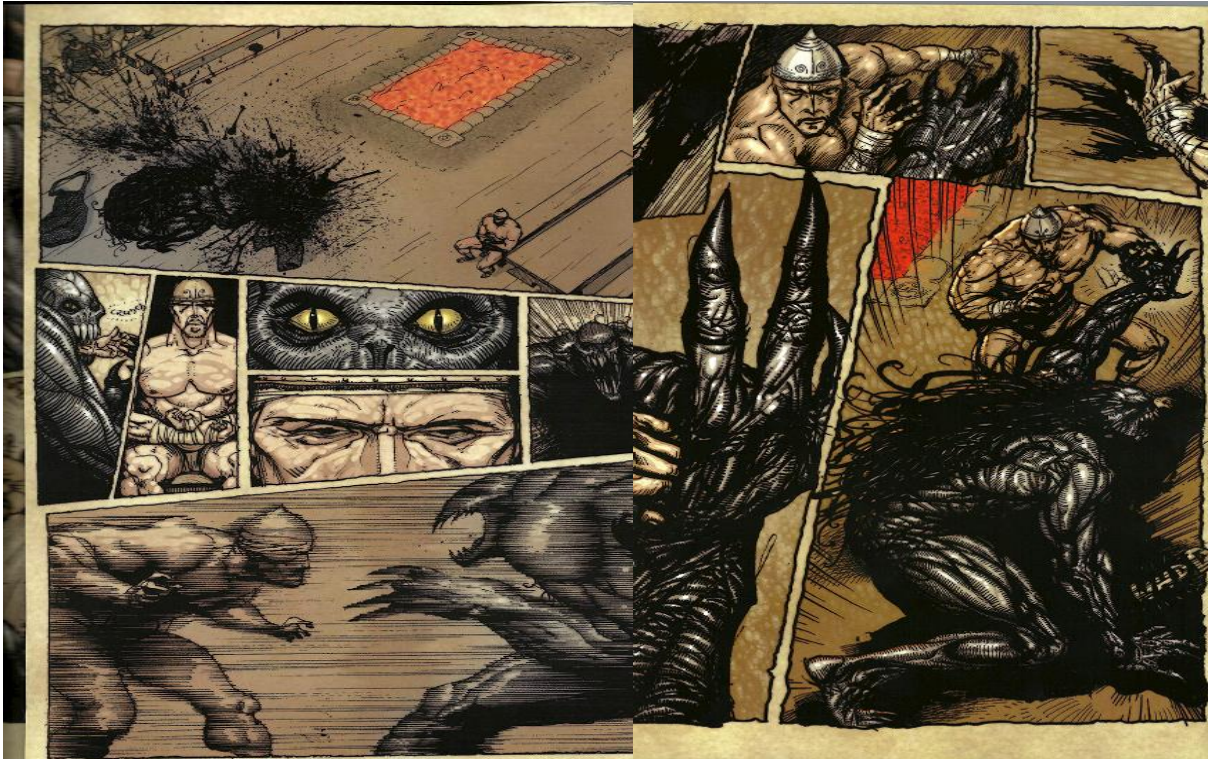


Fig. 1 Beowulf fights Grendel (Hinds 26-7)

Lefèvre discusses the use of cinematics in sequential art in an analysis of the Japanese manga *Lone Wolf and Cub*: like this duel scene, Hinds makes use of the film technique of shot/reverse shot, whereby the view of the events cuts between two shots from opposite directions (77); in this case, the shot/reverse shot is applied when Grendel first sees Beowulf, switching from one shot to another six times before they engage in battle. Lefèvre also analyzes the use of fragmentary panels—that is, extreme close-ups of part of the duelists' bodies (79). The content of the panels features a lot of close-ups: panels of Grendel's and Beowulf's eyes or faces in general are a recurring motif. One of the most interesting techniques Hinds uses is close-up shots of both characters designed to magnify one and erase the other; several panels features Beowulf's tiny human hand gripping Grendel's massive claw. Initially, it seems the effect is to draw attention to Grendel, but the longer one contemplates the art, the more it seems that

Grendel is supposed to fade into the background as the reader focuses on the strength apparent in Beowulf's grip.

Hinds' version also captures the hellish cries of Grendel which disturb the other warriors of the hall: after three pages of fighting panels, he cuts to a shot of Heorot from the outside, where Grendel's screams are represented as a train of vowels ("AIIIIIEEEEEIIIIIIYYY," 29) curling through the air, followed by a sequence of panels showing the frightened visages of various warriors.

The second graphic novel adaptation I looked at is a Spanish-language version by Santiago García and David Rubín. The physicality of the book is quite large, which the artwork utilizes advantageously. Where Hinds' panels were uneven and unexpected in their layout, García and Rubín use squares and rectangles which still overwhelm because of their sheer size. The first panel of Beowulf attacking Grendel is a gigantic two-page spread, and many of the successive panels are pretty large, too. Compared to Hinds, this version feels very condensed: there are 9 pages devoted to this scene, in contrast with 15 in Hinds, but what contributes more to this feeling of squeezing is the reduced number of panels. García and Rubín draw only 20 panels, compared to Hinds' 61; where Hinds is concerned with each individual move between Grendel and Beowulf, García and Rubín choose to illustrate more broadly (see fig. 2).

Grendel's hell-wailing has been excised from this version, but there is also an exterior shot of the hall with onomatopoeic words like "THUMP!!," "BOOM!!," and "CRASH!!" that, coupled with the broken boards on the building's exterior, demonstrate the violence of the struggle within (56). It struck me as curious that these onomatopoeias were in English, when there are others that appear in Spanish (for example, "TUMB" on page 60)—the only explanation I can suggest is that, much in the way I revised my haiku to better demonstrate the

nature-based tradition, García and Rubín are intentionally engaging with the American comic book culture by using traditional onomatopoeias. The absence, too, of the other soldiers' responses to the tumult really keeps the reader drawn into the fight—unlike the original text or Hinds, we are not supposed to be thinking about how this fight is affecting anyone else.



Fig. 2 Beowulf fights Grendel (García and Rubín 54-5)

One interesting contrast I noticed between the two versions is the use of color. Hinds' art is almost two-tone: Grendel is a black creature and Beowulf is almost pearly-white. The only other coloring in these panels is the brown of the hall, but it fades into the background against the stark differences between the human and the monster. García and Rubín, on the other hand, have a much redder color palate; the blood in the scene, of course, is red, but so are the backgrounds of a lot of panels. Grendel is black—or perhaps a dark brown—and Beowulf is still

white, but the heavy, angry presence of red is what really stands out more than the contrast between the two fighters.

Lefèvre also notes the use of *mise-en-scène* in *Lone Wolf and Cub*, taking particular care to focus on how the environment of the battle—in this case, an open field—is manipulated visually to enhance the fight (78-9). The way that both graphic novel versions choose to manipulate the *mise-en-scène* in their depictions of the fight is interesting: as previously mentioned, both feature panels providing exterior shots of Heorot to show a bird's-eye view of the struggle, but there are other moments when the background comes into view. In many panels both adaptations almost erase the environment, choosing only to highlight the two combatants, but there are a few moments when the artists choose to draw attention to the background.

Hinds shows Beowulf smashing Grendel into a supporting pillar and the wall (36-7); in one panel, there's a shot of an overturned bench (33). In García and Rubín, a two-page spread shows the monster and the warrior tumbling through the air, smashing a bench along the way (see fig. 2), and another panel shows Grendel's body destroying the wall (57). These moments when the artwork engages the *mise-en-scène* operate in the same way that the descriptions of the hall do in the original passage, amplifying the magnitude of the fight by indicating the extent of its destruction. It's subtler because there's no outright description of how sturdy the hall is, nor any moments where it might be indicated that the other Danes are surprised by the ruination of Heorot, which they believed impossible.

My assessment of the graphic novel as a possible medium for conveying the story is a positive one; the last ten or so years has seen an increase in graphic novel adaptations of classic literature, like *Pride and Prejudice*, the first six L. Frank Baum books about Oz, or even *The Odyssey* (which has been adapted by the very same Hinds responsible for the English-language

version I examined). Baetans and Frey discuss the increasing legitimacy of the graphic novel as a literary form, citing such authors as Jonathan Lethem and Michael Chabon as proponents of their place in literary culture (196); they note that because of “the (relative) timidity of the comics adaptations,” a timidity that comes from their still-rising “social status [as an] adaptating medium,” graphic novel retellings are often more “reverential” to the original text than, for example, films (202). In fact, graphic novels are becoming so popular that major publishing house Penguin commissioned graphic artists to design covers for their Penguin Classic Deluxe series that looked like comics, including texts like *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* and *The Jungle* (211).

Even taking into account the rise in popularity, acceptance of, and reverence inherent in the graphic novel form, it’s not necessarily a perfect match: as I noted above, it’s easy for bits of textual information to get swallowed up by the graphic narrative because of complications in trying to visually represent actionless text. Baetans and Frey point to David Mazucchelli’s adaptation of Paul Auster’s *City of Glass* as one such example: the original novel, a postmodern piece of existentialism, reduces whole pages of introspective thought into a page or a panel (151). Based on the two versions of graphic novel adaptation I have studied, the general pattern seems to favor portrayal of action over long passages of thought—both versions have cut the Lay of the Last Survivor passage, for example, which I would be hesitant to do because of the cultural weight that the scene carries.

The third and final visual adaptation I examined was the 2007 film *Beowulf*, directed by Robert Zemeckis. The fight scene between Grendel and Beowulf lasts about five minutes, and there are some noticeable differences between the poem and the film. Most shocking is the way in which Beowulf wins the fight: the poem (and the two graphic novels) make it pretty clear that

Beowulf is physically very, very strong, and it is this strength that affords him victory over the monster. Their battle is nothing more than a competition of strength, which Beowulf wins when he rips off Grendel's arm.

The movie, on the other hand, portrays Beowulf less as a brute-strength warrior than a clever, Odysseus-like man who manipulates his resources in order to achieve victory: he pours alcohol on an open fire to fill Heorot with smoke, swings from a chandelier, and tricks Grendel into catching his arm in a chain. As the monster tries to flee, the chain runs out, leaving him trapped in the doorway, and it is with repeated slammings of the door on Grendel's arm that the limb is detached. The Grendel of this movie version has a prominent weakness, which Beowulf discovers and exploits: he has a very sensitive outer eardrum that does not respond well to human voices. The warrior realizes this and screams several times before repeatedly smashing the eardrum until it bursts.

This eardrum brings me to a question about the visual media I considered: the way in which Grendel is portrayed varies from adaptation to adaptation. Each of these depictions fascinated me, especially because Grendel is never physically described in the original text: as Lapidge points out, we know that Grendel is bigger than men and has iron fingernails and humanoid joints, but not much else (375). He analyzes some of the descriptions of the monster, noting the absence of physical details ("we, the audience, have no clear visual impression of the monster's appearance: it is a dark death-shadow in the shape of a man," 382) and the unclear meanings and etymology of some of the adjectives ("æglæca," 381) and even Grendel's name (378-9) contribute to this idea that Grendel is "a creature of completely unknown aspect or dimension" (384). Lapidge argues that this blankness of physicality is intentional on the part of the poet: in making Grendel's appearance vague, his approach to Heorot earlier in the poem is

made all the more terrifying (384) because what we know about Grendel is the same thing we know about the haunting creatures that stalk our own nightmares, “characteristically a monster in animal or sub-human form” (389).

In the case of a visual adaptation, however, we lose this fear of the unknown; in the three versions I have studied, Grendel is shown. In the Hinds version, Grendel is a black creature with huge teeth, yellow eyes, and locks of flowing, black hair. In the García and Rubín adaptation, Grendel is again black, but he looks scaly or somehow armored. His eyes are red, his teeth are less noticeable—what is more grotesque about his mouth in this version is his tongue, which is actually several smaller snake tongues. His hair looks almost tentacular—in comparison to Hinds’ Grendel, this one is much more reptilian. Marijane Osborn’s article “Translations, Versions, and Illustrations” features a few illustrated examples of Grendel, too: one of them, drawn by J. H. F. Bacon (369), depicts the monster in a style reminiscent of Goya’s painting of Cronos, which is to say a blobby creature with huge eyes and a big mouth.

Another, by Brian Froude (371), imitates the style of an illuminated manuscript like the Book of Kells, with traditional Celtic detail in the background with Grendel in the foreground. Here, he looks more human, and the artist appears to be drawing from the troll tradition—he is oversized with claws, huge limbs, and pointed, elven ears. The third illustration included was done by Leonard Baskin (365): of the three, this Grendel is the most blatantly human: the drawing style is quite unclear, perhaps potentially obfuscating, but aside from his claws, Baskin’s illustration looks like an artistic rendering of a Neanderthal with his face obscured.

In the 2007 movie, he looks more like an oversize child, a huge, naked humanoid creature. Because all three versions choose to show us Grendel, they rely on the terror inherent in the face of evil, and in that regard, perhaps the movie is most successful. It plays with our notion

of the uncanny—that which is familiar, perhaps uncomfortably so—by making Grendel almost human; certainly it's to the movie's benefit that Zemeckis utilizes his trademark motion-capture technology, which has often been criticized for falling into the uncanny valley (the idea that technology can imitate humans to a point, but when it becomes too realistic it is unbelievable and frightening) with its almost-photo-realistic computer animations of humans (in his review of the film for *The New York Times*, Manohla Dargis says “[a]lthough the human faces and especially the eyes in *Beowulf* look somewhat less creepy than they did in *The Polar Express*, Mr. Zemeckis's first experiment with performance capture, they still have neither the spark of true life nor...the soul”).

6. Spanish Translations of *Beowulf*

The collection of essays *Beowulf at Kalamazoo* features an article by María José Gómez-Calderón called, simply, “*Beowulf* in Spanish.” She discusses the history of Spanish translations of the epic poem and how various translators have dealt with the problems inherent in translating from one language family to another. She points out the poem’s cultural entry point—it originally appeared in an edited version for children, which played up the pagan, Nordic, and heroic elements, and for many years this conception of the text remained (117-8). It wasn’t until 1959 that a full translation appeared, done by Orestes Vera Pérez in prose (119). Since Pérez, only a handful have been published since. In the process of gathering sources for this project, I was only able to acquire one translation, Luis Lerate’s, in addition to the graphic novel adaptation. Gómez-Calderón mentions the absence of translations in her article: some editions “had been out of print for years and [were] very difficult to find” (121).

Translating *Beowulf* into Spanish comes with a different set of challenges: it requires work with another set of stress patterns and sound systems (bringing the total to three: I’m not talented enough to directly translate from OE to Spanish, so I had to work from OE to Modern English and from Modern English to Spanish). The Spanish language comes with its own history of epic poetic tradition, the language of which is not so changed from Old to Modern forms that it is practically foreign, as is the case with the source text and Modern English.

I translated the same three passages as in previous sections. The first step for each translation was to translate, word-for-word, the Modern English (taken from sections 3a, 4a, and 5a) into Modern Spanish: these are verse, insofar as I leave the line breaks as they appear in my English translations. These become the source texts for the other translations.

6a. The Introduction (Lines 1-25)

¡Oigan! Supimos de la gloria
 De antaño, gloria de los reyes
 De los gardaneses,
 Como los príncipes realizaron la valentía.
 A menudo Scyld Scefing robó los bancos
 De los soldados enemigos de las varias tribus;
 Dio terror a los condes, después de que fuera
 Encontrado destituido. Era consolado,
 Creció debajo del cielo y prosperó con honra
 Hasta que cada una de las tribus vecinas
 A través del océano tuvieran que obedecerlo
 Y pagarlo un tributo. ¡Era un gran rey!
 Engendró un hijo,
 Un joven en los terrenos palaciegos, él que dio Dios
 Al pueblo como consolación; entendió su angustia calamitosa,
 Que habían sufrido sin un líder
 Por muchos años. El gobernante de gloria,
 El Señor de vida, le dio el honor mundial:
 Beow era famoso—su gloria era
 Ampliamente conocida—entre el pueblo escandinavo.
 Un hombre joven tiene que asegurar
 Que compañeros van a apoyarlo luego—
 Cuando estén viejos, que vayan a apoyarlo cuando venga la guerra—
 Por la bondad, por el dispensar de tesoro,
 Mientras que está en el cuidado de su padre.
 Un hombre de cualquiera tribu prosperará por hechos loables.

One of the first challenges I came across in this passage was character names—as I mentioned above, Spanish comes with its own sound system which has rules for how, for example, consonant clusters can be formed. These rules pose a problem thinking about how to represent the names of these characters in Spanish: the spellings of the names as they appear in the OE text would not be sight-read properly by speakers of Spanish.

The most obvious issue posed in this passage is the name “Scyld Scefing.” The initial sound in each word—represented orthographically by “sc”—is pronounced like /ʃ/ (“sh” orthographically in Modern English), a sound which does not exist in almost all dialects of Spanish. The “y” is pronounced as in French (i.e., /y/), a vowel also absent from Spanish, and the

consonant cluster “ld” appearing word-finally is an impossibility, syllabically speaking (though “-lde,” as in *tilde*, is permissible). The vowels in “Scefing” don’t pose much of a problem, though the “ng” cluster, which doesn’t occur in Spanish, does.

There were three possibilities that occurred to me: the first was to transliterate all of the characters’ names: Scyld Scefing would become “Esquilde Esquevin,” Beowulf would be “Beovulfo,” and Hygelac would be “Jillelaco.” I discarded this idea, however: for one, the transliterations look comically foreign, especially “Esquevin” and “Jillelaco,” which robs them of the (perhaps dramatic) feeling of these names as old and from distant lands.

The second possibility was to translate the meanings of these names: “Scyld Scefing” means “Scyld, son of Scef”; going one step further in translating, “scyld” means “shield” and “scef” means “sheaf,” so that would leave us with “Shield, son of Sheaf” (indeed, Heaney says “Shield Sheafson,” 3). In Spanish, that would give us “Escudo, hijo de Gavilla.” I might even make use of the patronymic ending “-ez,” seen in surnames like “Martínez,” (meaning “son of Martín”), which would make “hijo de Gavilla” into “Gavillez.” The final result of all of this, then, would be a translation of “Scyld Scefing” into “Escudo Gavillez.” This result feels strange in the way meeting someone with the first name “Coffee” or “Curtain” would feel strange—translating the name of the warrior into a noun, one not used for names in the way that “Grace” or “Autumn” are, is very alienating and, again, almost humorous in how bizarre it is. Leaving the names untranslated—as most Modern English translations choose to do—doesn’t have these accidentally funny effects.

The third option for names is to leave them exactly the way they appear in the text, which is what I chose to do. There are a lot of differences between orthography from OE to Spanish, but the same is true of OE to Modern English (I hear “skilled” as a pronunciation of “Scyld” and

“higgle-lack” for “Hygelac” frequently). The convention in Modern English translations is to leave the names orthographically unchanged (as in Donaldson or Chickering), a convention I’m comfortable with. A general readership might be confused by these names, but the suggestion that a different culture’s names should always be translated for a reader means any character in a Murakami book should be robbed of their Japanese names, or that Gabriel García Márquez’s characters should be translated to “Joseph” and “Joseph the Second”—translating names robs texts of their cultural heritage, which is not something I’m comfortable sacrificing for a general readership when an easier solution is to include a pronunciation guide to names.

The other two concerns I encountered were minor: the first was how to translate “hwæt,” the translation of which is controversial. It’s intended as a call to attention, and the tradition is to translate it as “listen” (Chickering 49), “indeed” (Hieatt 23) or even the discourse marker “yes” (Donaldson 3). I settled on the 3rd-person plural imperative form of “oír,” which means “to listen” (that is, “all of you must listen!”), playing with the use of “oye” (the 3rd-person singular imperative) as an attention-grabbing word (like “hey!” in Modern English, or “hwæt” as it appears in this context in *Beowulf*). The second was how to translate “gar-dena.” In my Modern English translation, I had rendered this as “Spear-Danes,” translating the two parts of the compound and then connecting them together again. Instead of translating “gar” as “lanza” to rewrite the compound as “lanza-daneses,” I chose to leave “gar” (“gardaneses”) in order to further the foreignized effect inherent in the unaltered names.

Next, I translated this passage into prose:

¡Oigan! Supimos de la gloria de antaño, gloria de los reyes de los gardaneses, cómo los príncipes dirigieron la valentía suprema. A menudo, Scyld Scefing, un guerrero tan feroz, capturó los salones de los soldados enemigos, tribus cuyas lanzas no eran tan afiladas como las de Scyld. Dio terror a los condes, terror que sacude los huesos. Era tan

espantoso que todas las tribus, incluso las ultramarinas, tras las ondas escarchadas, tenían que obedecerlo y pagarlo arcas de oro reluciente. ¡Era un gran rey!

Engendró a un hijo, él que dio Dios al pueblo gardanés como consolación—había muchos años, años largos y calamitosos, años en que habían sufrido sin líder. El gobernante de gloria, el señor de vida, le dio al hijo el honor mundial: Beow era famoso y todo el pueblo escandinavo habló de él. Un joven como Beow tiene que asegurarse de que compañeros vayan a apoyarlo cuando están más viejos, que vayan a apoyarlo cuando venga la guerra, asegurarlos por la bondad, con el dispensar del tesoro, mientras que está cuidado por padre. Un hombre de cualquier tribu prosperará por hechos loables.

Moving from the straight verse translation to prose caused no problems. I had to make a decision about apposition as in every other instance of translation, and decided to keep it for this version; to make it less challenging, I repeated the appositive noun each time (in this case, “año”). This made the connection between each clause immediate and concrete, something not necessarily true of OE.

Next, I attempted my first Old Spanish poetic style, the *mester de juglaría*. This form was typically performed by people with roles analogous to those of minstrels or OE *scops* (Mount and Cash 1), which is to say that the form was more often used in oral recitations (Walters 3). The conventions require that each line consist of approximately sixteen syllables, with assonant rhyme—that is, “repetition of similar vowel sounds” (Walter 3)—at the end of each line (Mount and Cash 1). Clusters of lines that share the same assonance were divided into stanzas called *tiradas*, the lengths of which were not fixed and whose divisions depended entirely on the assonant rhyme that united them (Menocal x).

¡Oigan! Supimos de la gloria, gloria de antaño,
De los reyes gardaneses. Scyld Scefing, un guerrero
Tan feroz, capturó los salones de los enemigos—
Dio terror a los condes, ¡terror que sacude los huesos!

Todas las tribus, incluso las ultramarinas,

Que vivían ahí, tras las ondas escarchadas,
 Tenían que pagar tributo, oro lucero en arcas
 Que brilla y luce. ¡Scyld era el guía de gloria!

Engendró a un hijo, una consolación de Dios,
 Después de muchos años, años calamitosos
 En que sufrieron sin líder. Dios le dio al hijo
 El honor mundial, honra tan grande. Beow era famoso;
 Sabe la necesidad de asegurar a compañeros

Con tesoro para que lo apoyen en la guerra.
 Un hombre prosperará por acciones benévolas y buenas.

The *mester de juglaría* is exemplified in “Spain’s national epic,” *El cantar de mio Cid*, and the loose parallel between these two texts is why I chose this style as a possibility. I faced little difficulty in translating this passage in this style because of its relatively unrestrictive requirements. In fact, the only area of trouble was the end of the third *tirada* and the beginning of the fourth: flipping through an edition of the *Cid* shows that these stanza divisions usually come at the end of sentence (i.e., each *tirada* is a complete thought). I was hesitant to divide a sentence across a *tirada* break, but there doesn’t seem to be a hard rule against doing so—indeed, the 28th *tirada* of the *Cid* concludes with an unfinished sentence resumed in the 29th (Raffel 40). Having found that exception in that text, my concern was allayed.

As an option for stylizing a Spanish translation of *Beowulf*, the *mester de juglaría* is an attractive one. Its freer style—a range of syllables per line, making sure that each line ends with the same vowel in a language where almost every word ends with *-o* or *-a*, and changing the vowel whenever convenient to the poet—makes it an easy to transplant a text into it. However, as I concluded in my exploration of the first section, there is nothing simple about the OE style—the *mester de juglaría* left me wanting a bigger challenge.

My initial translation:

Había muchos tesoros en el salón de la tierra,
 Como de antaño, tesoros de un grupo de hombres desconocidos,
 Un legado inmenso de un pueblo noble.
 Pensativo, aquí un hombre escondió
 El botín querido. La muerte destruyó a todos
 En aquellos tiempos, y todavía uno de esos hombres
 Del cuerpo de parientes allá quedaba más que nadie,
 Un guardián de luto. Esperaba lo mismo,
 Que habría sido permitido disfrutar
 La preciosidad vieja solamente por un ratito más.
 El túmulo, ya preparado, estaba en la llanura,
 Cerca de la mar, hecha constreñidamente.
 Al túmulo llevó una parte de los tesoros de la nobleza,
 Tesoros de oro vistoso, digno de ser acumulado.
 El guardián de los anillos habló pocas palabras:
 “Ahora sujete, tierra, porque los héroes no pueden,
 Los bienes de los condes. La gente los adquirió de ti.
 La muerte, ataque mortal, la atrevida, llevó a cada uno
 De los varones de la gente mía en la batalla,
 Los cuales que renunciaron esta vida.
 Habían visto las alegrías del gran salón.
 No tengo a nadie que pueda llevar una espada,
 Ni llevar adelante una copa dorada,
 Vasija querida; el bando de veteranos salieron.
 El yelmo duro, forjado con oro,
 Tiene que ser privado del adorno; los pulidores duermen,
 Los que tienen que preparar el yelmo;
 Y asimismo la malla que en la guerra sufrió
 El corte del hierro y el choque de escudos.
 Se desvencija al igual que su hombre.
 El coselete no puede ir con el caudillo
 En las espaldas de los guerreros.
 De ninguna manera vuela por toda parte de la sala
 La alegría del arpa, la música de la viga de coro,
 Ni el halcón, ni el caballo rápido
 Pisa las pezuñas. La muerte siniestra ha
 Destruído mucho del pueblo.”
 Así triste de mente, se quejó del dolor.
 Solitario sin ellos, era infeliz
 Por días y noches, hasta la inundación de la muerte
 Llegó al corazón.

The most difficult part of translating this passage in particular was the prevalence of cultural vocabulary: “helmet,” “byrnie,” all the specific, synonymous words for “man” or “warrior.” My knowledge of these words in Spanish is practically nonexistent, so I had to turn to the translation I had access to as well as to the consultation of one of my faculty advisors for suggestions. I don’t know that I’ll ever be assured “malla” is a perfect gloss for “war-cloak,” or that “salón” works as a translation for “hall.”

Once I found suitable equivalents, I moved to the prose translation:

Había muchos tesoros en el salón de la tierra, como de antaño, tesoros de hombres olvidados, un legado inmenso de su ferocidad como soldados. Pensativo, un hombre de ellos aquí escondió el botín querido porque la muerte, el monstruo feroz, la criatura terrible, destruyó todo.

El hombre, el único sobreviviente, sabía que sólo tenía un breve rato para disfrutar la preciosidad de su pueblo. Preparó un túmulo cerca de la frígida mar, su apertura oscura y constreñida; en este, puso los tesoros de oro vistoso. El guardián habló:

—Sujete ahora, tierra, los bienes de los condes porque los héroes no pueden. La muerte cruel, la muerte atrevida, la muerte sanguinaria, llevó a cada uno de los varones de la gente mía. No tengo a nadie que pueda llevar una espada, ni llevar la copa dorada, la vasija querida.

—El yelmo duro, forjado con oro, tiene que ser privado del adorno mientras los pulidores duermen eternamente. Asimismo la malla que sufrió el corte del hierro y el choque de escudos se desvencija al igual que su hombre.

—Nuestra sala, una vez animada y alegre, ahora es enervante en su silencio. No se puede oír la música feliz del arpa, ni sentir las alas vellosas del halcón, ni mirar el caballo y sus fuertes pezuñas. La muerte siniestra ha reclamado todo.

Así triste de mente, el guardián sobreviviente se quejó de dolor de alma. Solo, solitario, aislado sin sus compañeros, existía solamente en tristeza hasta la inundación congelada de la muerte agarró su corazón.

This prose translation didn’t pose any problems, either. Once again, I left in the apposition, even taking the liberty to add some toward the last paragraph (“solo, solitario, aislado”) in order to reinforce the loneliness of the last survivor.

The next medieval form I wanted to try was the *mester de clerecía*: this form coexisted alongside the *mester de juglaría* (Walters 2), but was considered a more learned style of writing, chiefly practiced by monks, influenced by French poetry (Mount and Cash 1). Stylistically, this method is more rigid: “the lines are made up of...two hemistichs (half lines) of seven syllables each” grouped into stanzas of four lines that share a consonantal rhyme (Walter 3). My translation in this style follows:

Había en la tierra Mucho oro vistoso, El botín querido que Por un grupo de hombres,	tesoro olvidado, un inmenso legado, se había dejado cada uno soldado.
Sólo quedaba uno; —No tengo mis hermanos Esta vida vacía. Escondo las espadas	solo y triste, dijo: de lucha. No elijo En este escondrijo, manchadas. No predijo
Nadie que el alijo Que la malla de hierro Que el tesoro nuestro No hay risa en nuestra	descuidado sería, se desvencijaría, nunca más brillaría. sala, ni alegría.
Ya no hay música del Del halcón, ni pezuña Una vez animada, Tranquilidad fuerte; no	dulce arpa, ni ala del caballo. La sala, se llena de la mala: hay nadie que exhala.—
Los recuerdos felices La muerte malvada, la Asiera el corazón. Para el ejército	su alma enlutó; caza ejecutó: Su dolor disfrutó; de muertes reclutó.

This version proved to be more challenging, in particular because of the rhyme scheme: as with the ballad, I had to consult a rhyming dictionary several times to find words for the rhyme scheme I had initiated (like “escondrijo” and “reclutó,” the latter of which forced me to invent a line of text not found in the original). The *mester de clerecía* forced me into a lot of syntactic inversions (“Los recuerdos felices / su alma enlutó,” where I might construct that sentence

normally by saying “Los recuerdos felices enlutó su alma”), which I tried to fight against initially and then use intentionally to echo the fluid syntax of OE generally and this passage specifically, which I discussed in section 4e. As in the sestina or the ballad, I was frequently forced to excise material that I couldn’t easily fit into syllabic and rhyme schemes, because my concern was more about accurately using the style instead of preserving all of the information.

One thing that sticks out every time I look over this version is the awkward phrasing I use to transition from the second stanza to the third. “[N]o predijo // nadie que...” is something not found in the original text. Its inclusion is completely functional, as I was pressed for a final rhyme for the second stanza and looking for a verb that would trigger the verb tense I use repeatedly in the third stanza, the conditional. This tense in Spanish is very easy to rhyme with other verbs in the conditional (“sería,” desvencijaría,” and “brillaría” are all verbs conjugated in the conditional).

While the *mester de clerecía* satisfied the formal restrictiveness of OE poetry, there are other issues to take into consideration: as when I translated this passage into, for example, haiku form in section 4c, I had to consciously think about the historical precedence of the tradition. In this case, the *mester de clerecía* is typically used to convey didactic, religious (typically hagiographical) texts (Mount and Cash 1); one renowned poet who worked in the *clerecía* style, Gonzalo de Berceo, wrote texts like *Los milagros de nuestra señora* and *Vida de San Millán de la Cogolla*, which discuss the miracles and lives of religious figures. *Beowulf* certainly doesn’t fit in this genre; as with the haiku, I am hesitant to appropriate a cultural form and discard its history.

6c. Beowulf Fights Grendel (Lines 758-790)

My translation:

El valiente, el pariente de Hygelac, se acordó del
 Discurso vespertino. Se levantó
 Y agarró a Grendel. Los dedos se rompieron.
 El gigante se giraba mientras que el héroe marchaba
 hacia él.
 El notorio quiso huir al refugio de los pantanos.
 Sabía el poder de los dedos
 En las garras del enfadado Beowulf. La jornada que
 sufrió Grendel
 Al Heorot era lleno de duelo.
 La sala resonó. Les pasó terror para todos los daneses,
 Los que habitan la fortaleza, los bravos,
 Los soldados. Los guardianes de la sala
 Eran furiosos, enojados. La sala resonó.
 Se maravillaron que la sala de vino
 Resistiera a las alimañas de batalla, que el edificio hermoso
 No se cayera a la tierra. Pero era abrochado
 Dentro y por fuera con bandas forjados con pensamiento
 ingenioso, bandas de hierro.
 Más de un banco, hecho con oro, era arrancado
 Del piso, como he oído. Acá, los hostiles se forcejearon.
 Ellos, los hombres sabios de Scyld, no habían esperado
 Que cualquier hombre la estallara por maneras ordinarias,
 Excelente y decorado con huesos, con habilidades para
 destrozarla
 A menos que el abrazo de fuego la engulló en llamas.
 Un ruido surgió, suficientemente sorprendido.
 El horror temido emanó hacia los daneses,
 Para cada uno de ellos que, del muro,
 Oyó al enemigo de Dios, el captivo del infierno,
 Cantar una canción terrible, el llanto, las heridas para llorar
 Una canción sin victoria. Beowulf mantenía al Grendel,
 Él que era el hombre más fuerte por su fuerza
 En aquel día de esta vida.

As before, one of my biggest challenges was the translation of cultural words, especially words about soldiers: one solution suggested to me was the use of *pariente*, a word that in Modern Spanish means “person of familial relation,” but here carries the connotation of “troop member with a strong bond.” Other than these words, this translation went smoothly. My prose rendition follows:

El valiente, pariente de Hygelac, se acordó del discurso vespertino. Se levantó y se asió a Grendel hasta que los dedos se astillaron. El gigante se giraba mientras que el héroe marchaba hacia él. El notorio quiso huir, quiso escapar, quiso soltarse del salón; sabía el poder de los dedos en las garras del enfadado Beowulf. La jornada que sufrió Grendel al Heorot estaba llena de duelo y miseria.

La sala resonó con el traqueteo de la lucha. Les pasó terror indefinible para todos los daneses, los que habitaban la fortaleza, los bravos, los soldados. Los guardianes del salón estaban rabiosos, enfurecidos mientras que la sala resonó; se maravillaron que la sala resistiera a las alimañas de batalla, que el edificio tan hermoso no se cayera en ruinas. Era abrochado dentro y por fuera con bandas de hierro forjado, bandas artificiosas. Más de un banco, hecho de oro, estaba arrancado del piso. Aquí, los hostiles se forcejearon.

Los hombres de Scyld, los sabios, no habían esperado que cualquier hombre estallara el salón por arte ordinaria, el salón glorioso y decorado de hueso. No sospechaban que se pudiera destrozarlo a menos que el abrazo de fuego lo engulló en llamas ardientes. Un ruido surgió, un llanto que hieló la sangre. Este horror emanó hacia los daneses, hacia cada uno de ellos que oyó al enemigo de Dios, el captivo del infierno, cantar una canción terrible, una canción sin victoria. Beowulf mantenía al Grendel, él que era el hombre más fuerte por su fuerza en aquel día de esta vida.

I also thought about translating this passage in the style of OE poetry: Gómez-Calderón notes in her article that the variety of existing translations of *Beowulf* into Spanish have tried to incorporate various elements: Lerate's translation uses "an imitative verse that reproduces the rhythmical pattern of Old English poetry" but ignores alliteration (122); Bravo tries to "follow the line order of the original wherever...possible" (123); Roa tries to recreate the feeling of ancient poetry by filling his version with "a learned vocabulary with numerous Latinisms" (127). None of these, however, mix all of the elements—verse, four-stress lines, and alliteration—so I set out to do so:

El valiente varón
Y se adhirió a Grendel
Se astillaron. El gigante

no vacilaba—se levantó
hasta que los dedos
se giraba: quiso huir,

Quiso soltarse	del salón. Sabía
El poder del enfadado.	La batalla estaba
Llena de duelo	y gritos de desdicha;
La sala resonó	con el ruido de la pelea.
Los guardianes estaban	enfurecidos y espantados
Por los ruidos rabiosos	que resonaban del salón.
Se maravillaron que la sala	resistiera la monstruosa
Lucha. El edificio	era abrochado
Con fierro y hueso,	fuertemente forjado.
Los hombres daneses	oyeron la destrucción
Del salón glorioso:	surgió un chillido,
Un lloro que huela	la sangre, un llanto
De la criatura infernal,	una canción sin victoria.
Beowulf era el hombre	más bravo del mundo.

As I was trying to manipulate the text into alliterating half-lines, I had to consider how I would handle alliteration: should I try to alliterate stressed syllables, even if they come near the end of the word, or should I rely on the initial sound of the word that carries stress? Ultimately, I went with word-initial alliteration, the way it works in Modern English: often, the word in the second half-line that alliterated with something in the first half-line was buried at the very end, putting so much distance between the sounds that the repetition doesn't feel prominent ("se maravillaron que la sala / resistiera la monstruosa"). There were some great successes with the alliteration, too ("El valiente varón / no vacilaba—se levantó" features 5 repetitions), but I felt limited by my lack of an expansive, synonym-replete Spanish vocabulary: if I had a more expansive knowledge of the language, there might have been a lot more satisfying alliteration.

6d. Conclusion

I come to the same conclusion here that I do in considering translation into Modern English: prose, as the common method for narration, is likely the best option for conveying *Beowulf* to a modern audience. I was able to retain features like apposition in the prose that were excised for metrical constraints in my verse translations. However, if verse is an absolutely

essential component to the translation of *Beowulf*, then I would be very tempted to use the *mester de juglaría*: despite being the “easier” of the two forms, is more than viable as a method for translating the entirety of the epic poem.

Mester de clerecía, while being mildly demanding in its structure, would be easier to write with generatively than as an algorithm into which an existing work must be entered. The *mester de juglaría*, while not as formally rigorous as OE poetry, has the benefit of being free enough that any text could be adapted to its style. Culturally, it’s also attractive because, even when written in contemporary Spanish, it is capable of evoking older poetry and, more specifically, a classic epic from the Spanish tradition, for a modern audience.

7. Conclusion

What ultimately feels most successful, after having translated these sections in so many varieties, is prose: as I mentioned earlier, prose is the most common way of expressing narratives in written form in contemporary literature, and for that reason alone, it seems the most logical choice to make when translating this work for a general audience. If I felt obligated to translate in verse, I might choose the cinquain, a form that seems relatively free of cultural and historical connotations; the poem's stylistics—that is, a consideration for stressed syllables—at least echoes one detail of *Beowulf*'s original form. Likely these are the two forms that I would pursue to complete a full translation of the project, which would come the closest to serving the common reader as envisioned at the beginning of this project: they don't necessarily require a convolution of the original for the purposes of repetition or rhyme; they are free enough in form to allow the text to be presented straightforwardly.

That doesn't necessarily mean that a whole translation is necessary: I would be satisfied with a presentation of this poem in snapshots—the three excerpts I have worked with here, if given a little more context, might teach general readers a lot about the text and the culture responsible for its creation. If that is the case, I might be willing to use the Old English imitative verse for the introduction (section 3f) which, in a small dose, could be educationally challenging. I would strongly champion the ghazal for the Lay of the Last Survivor passage, which, more effectively than any other form I utilized in that section, captured the mournful aesthetic of the original passage. For the battle scene, the ballad might be the better choice for Anglophone audiences because of the cultural connotations of the form.

Utilizing multiple forms of translation might produce a Frankenstein effect—a body composed of parts taken from other places—but contemporary English poetry has become so

distant from the original tradition of the source material, so mixed with influences from a variety of cultures, that this might be a valid approach. Modern English doesn't align itself with one style or convention, but incorporates many; to crowdsource (for lack of a better word) the translation by letting these many influences show seems to be just as much in line with my purpose of translating the poem for a general audience as a work of entirely prose.

There is, unfortunately, no single answer to this dilemma, but I propose that both of these ideas would be equally effective solutions.

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